



Homemade Bacon

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TOOLS:

- BBQ utensiles (1)
- Latex gloves (1)
or vinyl gloves
- Smoker (1)
- Ziplock bag (1)

PARTS:

- Pork belly (5-6 pounds)
- Molasses (1/4 cup)
- Coffee (1/4 cup)
- Herbs and spices (1/4-1/2 cup)
for savory bacon
- Hardwood (1)
for smoking
- Charcoal (1)
- Kosher salt (1)
1 lb
- Sugar (1)
8 oz
- Pink curing salt (10 teaspoons)

SUMMARY

Curing your own bacon from scratch is fun and not as difficult as you might think. You'll need a whole pork belly, a few easy-to-obtain ingredients and a smoker/BBQ capable of smoking at between 150°-200°F. In this guide I show two different bacons being made; one sweet,

one savory.

Before getting started take the time to thoroughly clean your work area. This project requires you to sling around rather large slabs of meat and you don't want to run out of workspace halfway through.

If you don't already have any dry-cure mix lying around you will need to make some now. Basic dry-cure is a mix of kosher salt, sugar and pink salt. Pink in this case refers to curing salt, which is regular table salt with 6.25% sodium nitrite added, and dyed pink for safety. This is an ingredient you cannot leave out. The hot smoking process holds the meat near the so-called "danger zone" for several hours and the nitrites prevent botulism from growing (it thrives in warm anaerobic environments like a smoker).

- To make the basic dry-cure mix use the following:
 - 1 lb kosher salt
 - 8 oz sugar
 - 10 teaspoons [pink curing salt](#)

Stored in an airtight jar it will last pretty much forever and can be used in many other cured-meat recipes.

Step 1 — Homemade Bacon



- Your first step will be to obtain a whole, raw pork belly. While most supermarkets aren't going to carry whole pork bellies you can find them pretty easily with a little leg work. Independent grocers that still keep a butcher on staff can get them for you, many ethnic markets often have them and there are several internet vendors that you can order organic, free range bellies from. However my favorite source is straight from a local small-time farmer. Many farmers' markets these days have farmers selling meat and many are happy to help with special orders.
- There really isn't much going on with bacon; it's basically just pork and spices. So the quality of the pork belly will greatly affect the taste of the bacon when you're done. It's worth the extra effort to get farm-raised pork, instead of feedlot pork. The bellies are thicker, with a better meat-to-fat ratio in farm-raised animals and the bacon has a richer, well, porkier flavor.
- Your pork belly may come with or without the skin. If you get one with the skin you'll want to leave it on through the whole process. You'll remove it after smoking.

Step 2



- Trim the edges of the belly so they are square(ish) with a clean straight cut. Ragged or tapering ends will soak up too much cure and smoke and won't be any good to eat.
- Save the trimmings, though, as they are good to eat. When they are cooked slow on a cast-iron skillet the fat renders out and leaves the meat tender and juicy like a good tenderloin.

Step 3



- If you don't already have any dry-cure mix lying around you will need to make some now. Basic dry-cure is a mix of kosher salt, sugar and pink salt. Pink in this case refers to curing salt, which is regular table salt with 6.25% sodium nitrite added, and dyed pink for safety. This is an ingredient you cannot leave out. The hot smoking process holds the meat near the so-called "danger zone" for several hours and the nitrites prevent botulism from growing (it thrives in warm anaerobic environments like a smoker).

- Mix together the kosher salt, sugar and pink salt in a bowl. Store in an airtight jar and it will last pretty much forever and can be used in many other cured-meat recipes.

- This is not an optional step. Without the nitrite in the pink salt you run the risk of botulism while smoking the meat. The nitrite is the magic ingredient that makes all this work. It also give the pork that bright pink bacon color we all know and love.



- You need about 1/4 cup of the dry-cure mix for this recipe, give or take. Go ahead and set that amount aside now and put the remainder in a clearly labeled jar.

Step 4



- Spread about 1/8 cup of the dry-cure mix out on a pan and dredge one side of the belly in it until you have a nice even coating. Pour on the other 1/8 cup of the mix and do the same to the other side and the edges. Rub it in good with your (gloved) hands. You only want as much cure as will stick on its own.
- After the belly is coated in dry-cure, throw out whatever was left in the in pan.
- Drizzle on your molasses in an even coat and sprinkle on the coffee grounds. As with all things coffee, grinding this yourself from beans is best.
- If making a savory bacon, sprinkle your spice mix and herbs on and pack them into the surface.

Step 5



- Carefully slide the belly into your big ziplock bag. I find the three-gallon size to be the best fit for a six-pound pork belly.
- Stash the bag in the fridge, preferably resting in a leak-proof container.
- The curing mix is going to pull a lot of water out of the belly, enough to create a super-concentrated brine. Every 48 hours or so take the bag out of the fridge and flip it over. This helps evenly distribute the brine for a better, safer cure.
- Different bellies will give up more water than others. Expect anywhere from 1/2 cup to almost 2 cups. In my experience bellies with the skin attached will be wetter than skinless ones.

Step 6



- The bellies will take between 7-10 days to cure, depending on size, thickness etc... They are done curing when the meat is no longer squishy and springy like raw meat. It will have a consistency closer to silly putty or play dough though a little softer than either.
- When the belly is done curing remove it from the bag, rinse it thoroughly in the sink and pat it dry with paper towels. You want to remove as much of the remaining cure/spices/herbs from the meat as possible. A few embedded peppercorns or the odd bit of coffee ground won't hurt anything though.
- You can store the belly in the fridge, wrapped in plastic or otherwise sealed up for up to three days before putting it in the smoker.
- Optional: The night before smoking leave the belly sitting in the fridge uncovered for 12-24 hours. This will let the meat form a tacky pellicle that will help it absorb the smokey goodness even better.

Step 7



- Take the bellies out of the fridge and let them start warming up at room temp while you prep your smoker.
- Do whatever you need to do to get your smoker ready for a "hot smoke" and light 'er up. We're looking for a cooking chamber temp between 150°-200°F. Any hotter than 200°F and you'll be roasting the bellies, not smoking them.
- I usually smoke with a mix of cherry wood and oak because of an abundance of cherry scrap from my woodshop and oak from all the branches my yard oaks drop. Also it's a delicious combination on bacon. You can use whatever you like; just remember that softwoods like pine are no good for smoking because of the resin content.
- Smoke the bellies until they reach an internal temperature of 150°F. In my smoker this takes about 2½ hours. Start checking the temp with a probe thermometer after about 90 minutes to get a feel for how fast it's cooking.
- Follow all safety protocols for your smoker as well as all local regulations regarding residential outdoor cooking! Never leave a charcoal smoker unattended!



Step 8



- After it comes off the smoker you can slice a little chunk off the end and chow down. It's delicious and you've earned it!
- After enjoying your sample, wrap the bacon slab in foil and let it rest at room temp for an hour or so before moving it back to the fridge. Yes, you need to chill it again. Yes, that means waiting several more hours; deal with it. :-)
- Once it's thoroughly chilled it will be much, much easier to slice. I have a small deli slicer I use when processing a slab of bacon like this and set it to take nice thick slices, about 1/8" or so. If you don't have a slicer like this use your longest, sharpest carving knife and mind your fingers!
- If stored in an airtight container the sliced bacon should keep for a good 3-4 weeks in the fridge. I like to vacuum-bag and freeze it which will give it an even longer shelf life.
- If your belly came with the skin attached go ahead and remove it while the bacon slab is still hot, but not too hot to handle safely. Lift up a corner and slide a sharp, thin knife in between the skin and the bacon and peel off the skin while slicing.



Step 9



- You're not limited to just making breakfast slices, of course. I like to save chunks from the end for seasoning soups and stews, for example. If you cut some up into 1/2" cubes and fry them, you have what's known as lardons, which can be added to just about any dish that would benefit from bacon. 
- You can cook the sliced bacon just like any regular bacon in a frying pan. It does cook a bit different though. It won't shrink up nearly as much as commercial bacon and it comes out thicker and meatier than even "thick cut" supermarket bacon. 
- For crispier bacon blanch the slices/lardons for one minute in simmering water before frying. This will also reduce the saltiness considerably. 
- Works excellent in a sandwich. Like for example this bacon, spinach and goat feta sandwich on a homemade kaiser roll. Yummy! 

You can try pretty much any herbs and spices or sweetener you like with your bacon. The only thing really required is the dry-cure mix. I've made bacon with just the dry-cure and maple syrup,

with birch syrup and a savory spice blend also photographed in this guide.

You can find everything you need but the pork at <http://www.butcherpacker.com>

For more information on making cured meats at home see *Charcuterie* by Michael Ruhlman and Brian Polcyn.

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